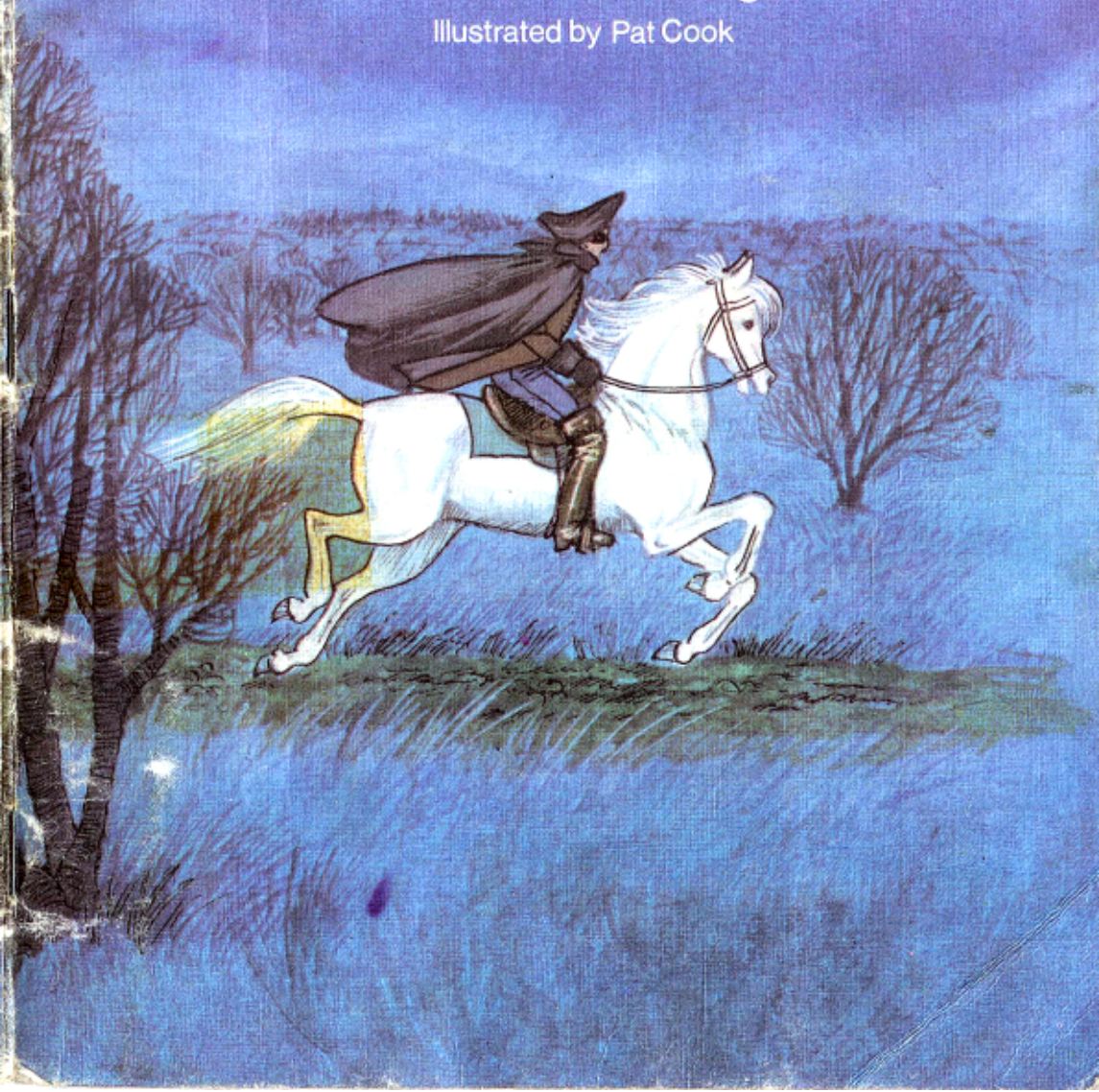


Tim and the Hidden People

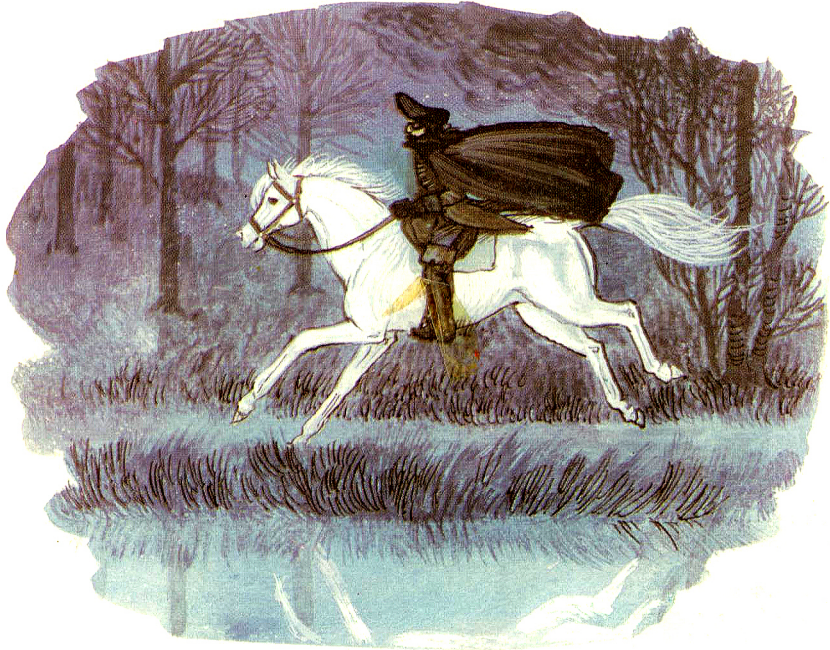
The Highwayman

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



The Highwayman



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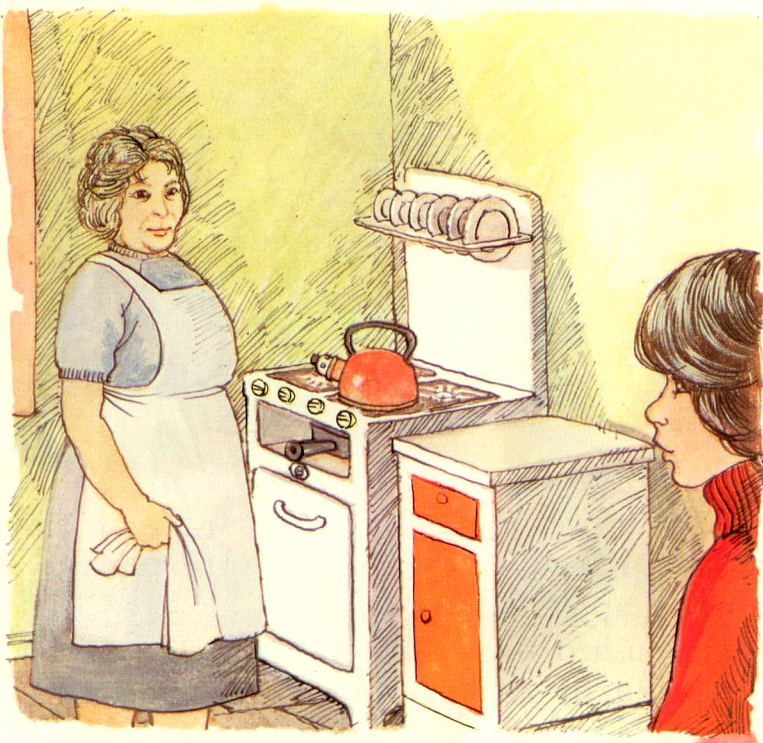


ARNOLD-WHEATON



Tim looked out of his attic window. It was Saturday morning, and a fine day.

He got dressed quickly, and ran downstairs. He knew just what he wanted to do: he wanted to go along the canal bank, to see if he could find Hollow Hill, where he had seen the Hidden People. He wanted to see it in daylight.



The kitchen looked bright and cheerful in the sunshine.

"You're up early," said Aunt May, as he opened the door. She had just put the kettle on the stove.

"Can I go out?" said Tim. "Out for the whole day, I mean."

"I don't see why not," said Aunt May. "I'm going to start the spring cleaning, and I shall be glad to have you out of the way."



As Tim was eating his breakfast, Aunt May made up some sandwiches for him, and gave him an apple.

He pushed them all into his pockets.

“You’ll be back for tea, won’t you?” said Aunt May.

“I think so,” said Tim.

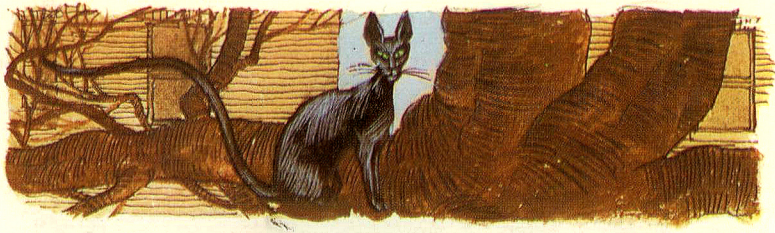
“Well, if you’re not in by five, I’ll leave the key under the stone,” said Aunt May. “I’ll leave your tea on the table. I’m working this evening.”

Tim nodded. Aunt May sometimes “helped out” at one of the shops in the town on Saturdays. There was a loose stone by the front steps, and Aunt May always put the key under it if they were both out.



Tim ran upstairs, and out into The Yard. It was such a bright, sunny day, that he was very surprised to see Tobias sitting on a branch of the old tree.

Tim was always surprised to see Tobias in the daytime. Tobias looked much more friendly in the daylight.



Tim ran over to the tree.

"Hallo, Tobias," he said. "Are you going out tonight?"

Tobias' eyes were very green and bright.

"Perhaps I am, and perhaps I'm not," he answered slowly. "Where are *you* going, Tim?"

"I'm going down the canal bank," said Tim. "I may go as far as Hollow Hill."

Tobias looked at him.

"Are you coming back in daylight, Tim?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Tim.

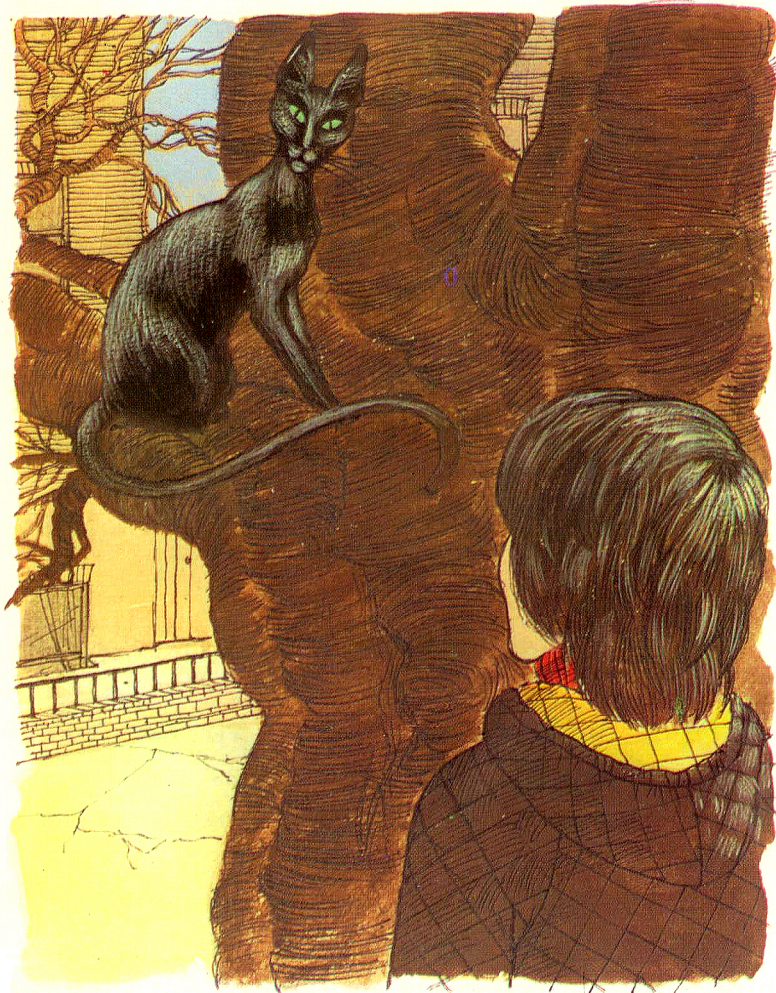
Tobias shook his head.

"I should get back in daylight, Tim, if I were you," he said. "Don't stay alone at Hollow Hill, once it gets dark."

"But —" Tim began, and stopped. "Is it the wild witches?" he said.

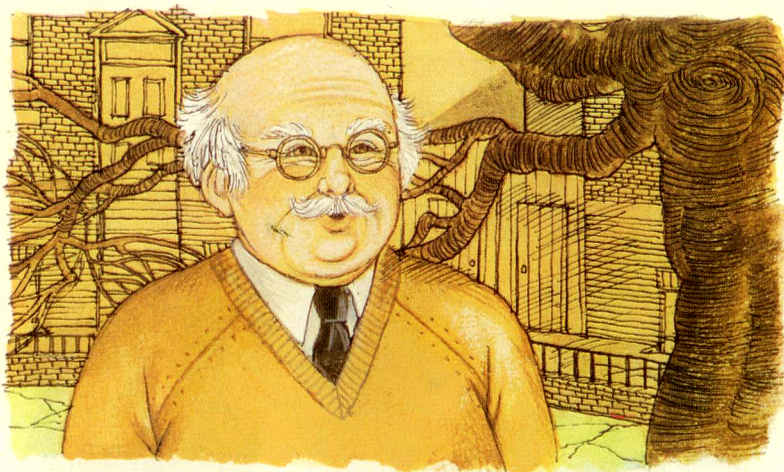
Tobias shook his head again.

"You won't see them on that side of the canal, Tim," he said. "When darkness comes, watch out for the Highwayman. I've heard he is about."



“Who is the Highwayman?” asked Tim.

“He’s someone you don’t want to meet, Tim, that’s who he is,” said Tobias. “Someone you don’t want to meet after dark.”



“Hallo, Tim,” someone said behind him.
“Talking to yourself, are you?”

Tim spun round.

Mr. Berryman was standing there, looking at him.

“Going out for the day?” asked Mr. Berryman.

“Yes,” said Tim. “How’s Sebastian?”

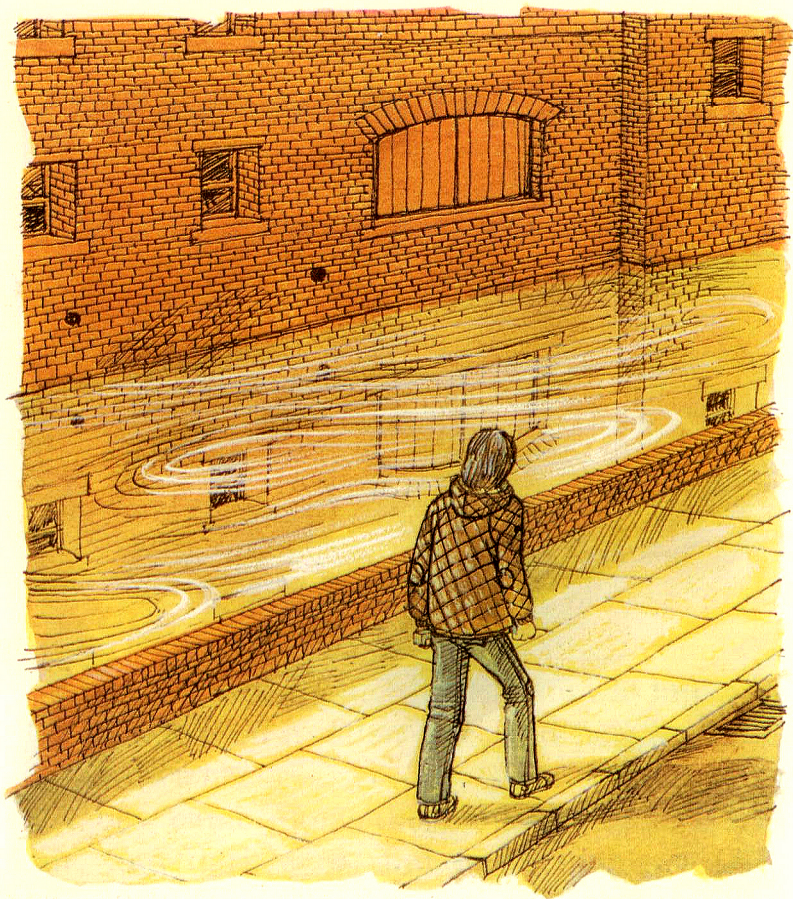
“Sebastian?” Mr. Berryman looked puzzled.

“The kitten,” said Tim.

“So you call him Sebastian, do you?” said Mr. Berryman. “Well, that’s a good name for him. He’s fine. Sleeping by the fire.”

Mr. Berryman nodded cheerfully, and went on.

Tim turned back to the tree. Tobias had vanished.



Tim went out of The Yard, and down the street along the canal.

He knew that he had only to follow the canal, and he would find the way out of the town. Once he was in the country, there was a path all the way along the bank.



But it wasn't as easy as Tim thought. It was a long way, and after he had gone a mile or so, the street ended. There was still a narrow track along the canal bank, but from time to time he came to big sheds right on the canal. He had to find his way around them, and across big yards full of lorries, to get back to the water again.



By the time he came to the open country, the sun was high in the sky, and Tim was hungry. He sat down on a fallen tree, and began to eat his sandwiches.

A boy came along the bank. He had black hair, and dark eyes, and for a moment Tim thought he might be one of the Hidden People. But he gave Tim a cheerful smile, and a nod as he went by.

Tim nodded back. The boy went on. Tim was sorry to see him go, and yet he didn't want to talk to anyone. Not yet. He wanted to get to Hollow Hill in daylight.

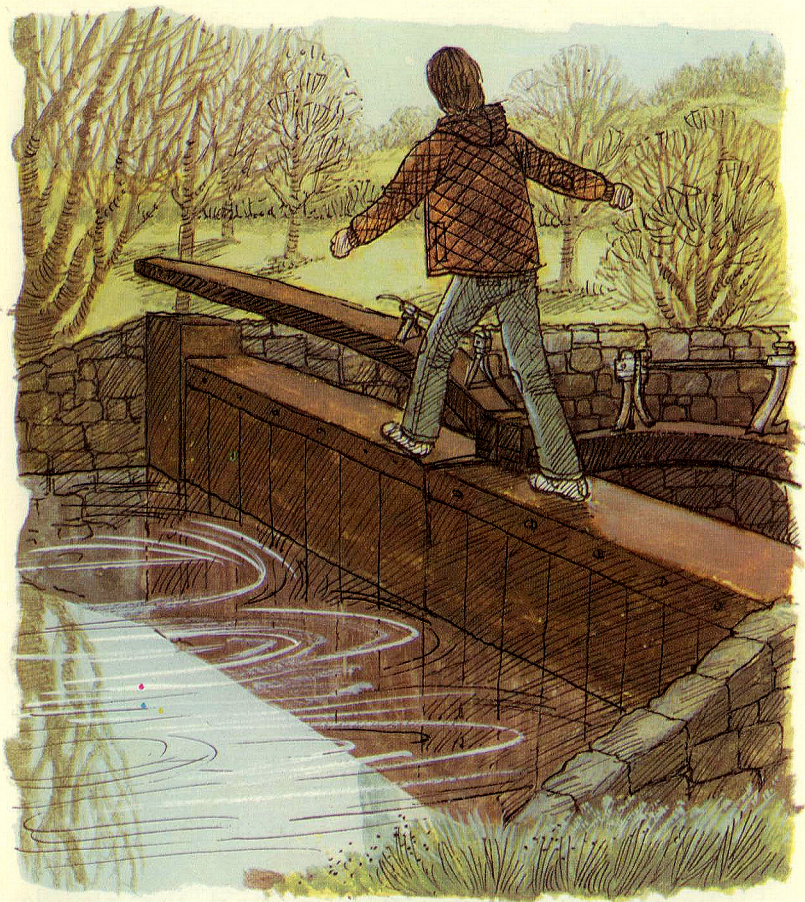


Tim pushed his apple back in his pocket. He would eat that later.

It was getting colder. Now that he was away from the houses, Tim felt the wind blowing. The wind was getting stronger.

Tim looked at the sky. The sun was still shining, but there were black clouds blowing up from the north.

He set off along the path at a run.



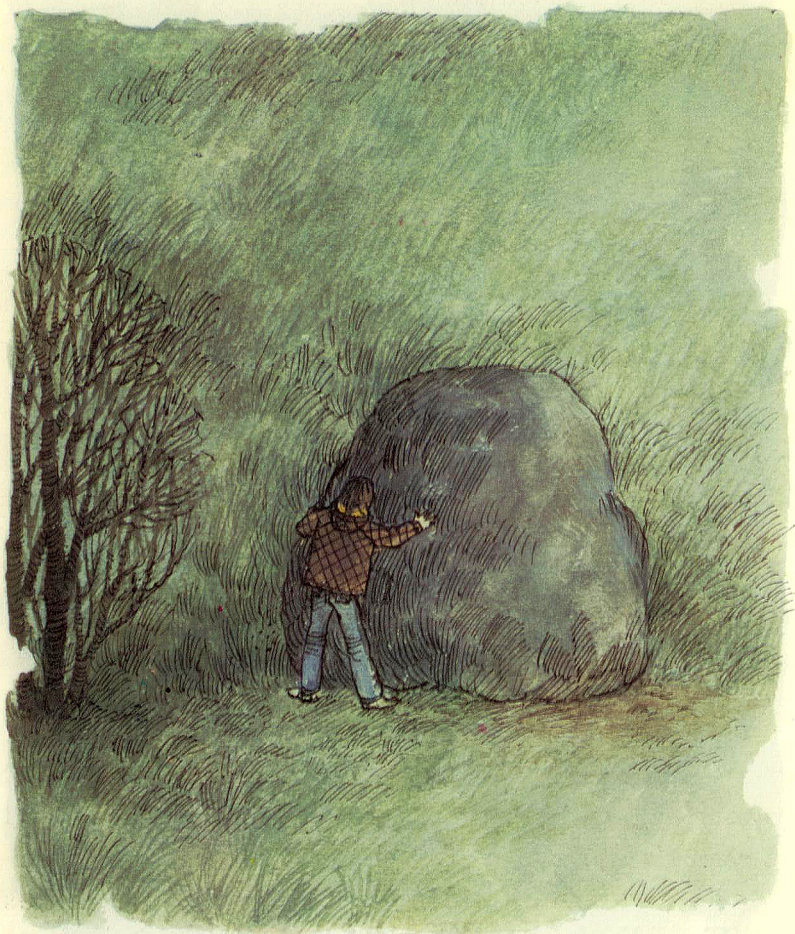
The canal ran on, with fields on each side, mile after mile. It seemed a long, long way, when at last he came to the lock gates. The gates were shut, and he remembered to cross the canal by walking across the top of them, to the left bank.



It was farther than Tim remembered, and he was very tired, when at last he saw Hollow Hill over the grass on his left.

The sun had gone in now, and the clouds were thicker. He left the canal, and walked over towards the hill.

He could see a big, grey stone, at the foot of the hill. It was very like the stone he had seen roll back, like a door, when he was with Captain Jory.



Tim went right up to the stone, and looked at it carefully. It was a big stone, but the grass at one side was muddy and flat. There were marks on the ground, as if something heavy had rolled over it.



Tim climbed slowly up the hill. There was a ring of trees on top of it. He came to a low bank, and then a ditch. The trees grew in a ring, and he could see a patch of grass in the middle. He crossed the ditch and went among the trees, and out on to the patch of grass.



Someone had lit a fire in the very middle of the grass, not very long ago. There was a black patch, full of ashes and half-burnt sticks.

Tim put his hand down to feel them. The ashes were still warm.



Tim suddenly felt very cold. He had been out for a long time, and he was hungry. He looked at the sky.

“It will be dark before very long,” he said to himself. “I’d better get home.”



He was just coming out of the trees, when he saw something moving on the path by the canal.

He dropped down into the ditch, and listened.

The wind suddenly dropped. Down there, below him, he heard the sound of a horse galloping.



He lifted his head, and looked down over the low bank, keeping himself hidden.

A man was riding along the river bank, back down the path towards the town. He wore a black three-cornered hat, pulled down over his face, a black mask and a long cloak. He rode hard, with his head down.

In a flash, Tim knew who he was. It was the Highwayman.



Tim waited, without moving, until the horse and rider were hidden by some bushes. The sound of the horse died away. A gust of wind shook the trees again.

Tim climbed out of the ditch, and ran down the hill and across the grass.



He was panting for breath by the time he got to the canal bank.

He looked quickly up and down, but he could see no one.

He set off along the path, back towards the town.



When he came to the bushes, Tim stopped and listened.

He could hear nothing but the wind.

He looked back towards Hollow Hill. He gasped, and stood as if he had been turned into stone.

On top of the hill, a fire was burning! He could see the flames leaping up among the trees. Someone had lit the fire in the ring at the top of the hill.



Tim turned and ran.

He forgot that he was tired. He forgot how far he had to go. It was cold and dark, and he was very frightened. He ran towards the town. The streets would be full of people now, and the lights would be on in the houses. Home was still a long way away, and he wanted to get there as soon as he could.

He came to the lock gates, climbed across them to the other bank, and ran on again. He felt a little safer on the other side of the canal.



Tim didn't know how long he had been running, when he saw a light on the path ahead of him.

He flung himself down behind a tree, panting. Someone was coming along with a flashlight. The light came nearer. It was the boy he had seen earlier.



Tim stood up. "Hallo!" he called.

The boy stopped, and flashed the light towards Tim.

"Who is it?" he called back.

"It's just me, Tim," called Tim. "I saw you on the path this afternoon."

"I remember," said the boy. He lowered the flashlight, and came over to Tim. His voice sounded friendly.

"Have you seen a watch? I dropped mine somewhere on the path. The strap broke."



“I haven’t seen it,” said Tim.

“It’s too dark to find it now, anyway,” said the boy. “Are you going back to the town?”

“Yes,” said Tim.

He was just going to ask the boy to walk along with him, when he suddenly stood still. The wind had dropped!

“What is it?” asked the boy.

“Listen!” whispered Tim.

Far off, he heard the sound of a horse galloping. It was coming nearer.



“Here,” he whispered quickly. “Hide! Put that light out.”

The light clicked off. Tim pulled the boy down behind a tree.

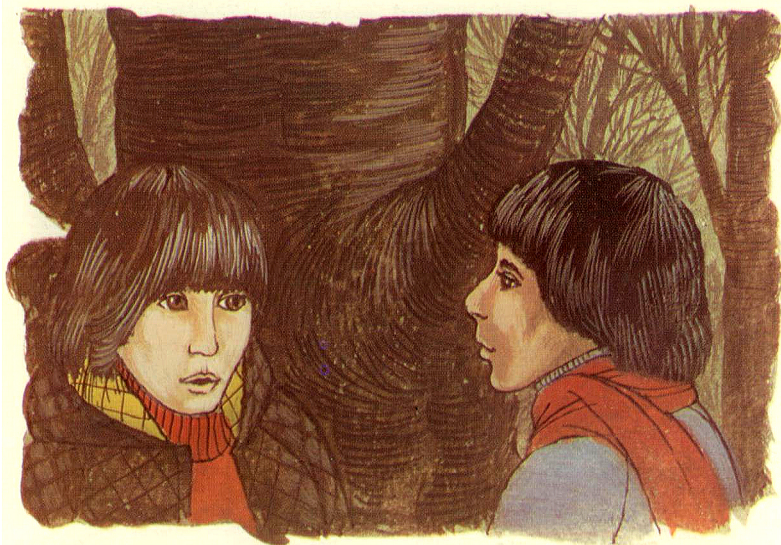
The sound of the galloping horse came nearer and nearer.

The boys kept still, scarcely daring to breathe.

The horseman thundered by on the far bank.

Tim saw the mask over his eyes, and as he passed his cloak fell back, and Tim saw the gleam of pistols at his belt.

Then he was gone. The sound of the horse’s hoofs died away, and a gust of wind blew the branches of the trees.



“What was it?” whispered the boy.

“Did you see him?” Tim whispered back.

“No. There was no one. But I felt something go by. And I think I heard a horse.”

Tim stood up.

“It was the Highwayman,” he said. “Come on, we had better be going.”

Tim didn’t know why, but he was sure he could trust this boy, and he knew the boy would believe him.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Arun.”

“Come on, then, Arun, let’s get home. I’ll tell you as we go.”



Tim and Arun walked back along the path. It was very dark now, but Tim no longer felt frightened. He felt almost cheerful. The boys used the flashlight from time to time, to see their way along the path, and as they went, Tim began to talk. He found himself telling Arun about the Highwayman, and the fire on Hollow Hill. He didn't tell him everything. He didn't tell him about Tobias, or the key; but he told him about the boat, and Jack and Captain Jory.

Arun listened as they walked along.

He didn't say very much, but Tim knew he had been right. He could trust Arun, and Arun understood.



When they came to the first houses, Arun stopped.

The lighted windows shone yellow and red and blue. The street lamps were all alight. The shops were still open, and there were people in the street.

Tim felt tired, but very happy.

"I shall have to go," said Arun. "We're staying with friends, and they live this way."

"Don't you live in the town?" asked Tim.

Arun shook his head. "We're going home in the morning," he said.

Tim's feeling of happiness vanished. "Oh," was all he said.

"Good-bye," said Arun. "Perhaps —"

"Good-bye," said Tim. "Thanks."

He turned, and ran off down the street. He didn't look back. He felt even more lonely than before.



He was so tired when he got back to The Yard, that he almost fell, as he lifted the stone by the front steps, and took out the door-key.

Aunt May had left his supper in the kitchen for him. She was still out.

Tim just picked up the plate, and took it with him as he stumbled upstairs to bed.

Flightpath to Reading A6



ARNOLD-WEARDON